

## FRAGMENTATION AND REINTEGRATION IN *RETAHÍLAS*

SUSAN PAUN  
Denison University

Carmen Martín Gaité's *Retahílas* is a celebration of discourse, of dialogue. Her two *locutores*, despite the mimetic quality of their speech, are not really mimetic in their circumstances, but rather are on the margin of conventional dialogue. Their situation is artificial and ideal, the atmosphere of their conversation «magical», as Martín Gaité herself recognizes<sup>1</sup>. In this idealized context, the two *locutores* meet in conditions corresponding to Bakhtin's basic model scenario, as explained by Michael Holquist:

...two people talking to each other in a specific dialogue at a particular time and in a particular place... [but not] as sovereign egos... Rather, each of the two persons [is] a consciousness at a specific point in the history of defining itself through the choice it has made...<sup>2</sup>

Related to this concept, Gonzalo Navajas makes an important point in a recent article: that the impetus behind the dialogue in *Retahílas* is a search for an identity which is a significant oneness, in which the *locutores* perceive the dialogue as a vehicle of

---

<sup>1</sup> «...ese clima que por una parte es mágico y por otra parte es tan estable en el tiempo que se está hablando, que la conversación te arropa de todo lo demás y te defiende de las amenazas de la neurosis y de todo lo que hay». Alicia Ramos, «Conversación con Carmen Martín Gaité, *Hispanic Journal*, vol. 1, n.º ii, 1979, 117-124, p. 122.

<sup>2</sup> Michael Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*. University of Texas Press: Austin, 1982. Ed. and intro., Michael Holquist, p. xx.

discovery, not merely as an exposition of what has occurred previously<sup>3</sup>. This corresponds to the modern confessional novel, which, according to Peter Axthelm, presents «a hero, at some point in his life, examining his past as well as his innermost thoughts, in an effort to achieve some form of perception»<sup>4</sup>. The self-discovery through dialogue in *Retahílas* includes Germán, but is centered upon Eulalia. It is she who, beginning in a state of familial and personal fragmentation, finally arrives at a reintegration. Eulalia, in the images of Martín Gaité, is able to tie up the loose ends, to see and comprehend the tapestry which she has been weaving all her life.

It is the purpose of this article to illustrate the fragmentation and reintegration of Eulalia through symbols and imagery of individuation (in the Jungian sense). I will not examine imagery of ties and attachment since this has been done ably by Kathleen M. Glenn<sup>5</sup>. Rather, I will concentrate on symbols of journey and change, of identification, of passage of time, and of death. Neither will I mention more than in passing imagery of direct communication through words (that is, conversation, letters, etc.), since this has been heretofore the focus of most of the critical attention paid to this novel. Instead, I prefer to focus on identification and the process of reintegration of the self.

The fragmentation of Germán and Eulalia consists, in part, in their alienation from their family. Both are «víctimas de la familia», having broken bonds with the past (Eulalia is estranged from her grandmother and from Juana, German from Eulalia herself, and both feel the loss of Lucía), with the present (both Eulalia and Germán have strained and hostile relations with Germán padre and Colette), and with the future, in that both have shaky or doubtful relationships with their partners (Eulalia is separated from Andrés

<sup>3</sup> «Los locutores perciben el diálogo como un vehículo de *descubrimiento* y no meramente como una presentación expositiva de hechos o situaciones ya ocurridos. Del mismo modo en que el yo de los participantes se va haciendo en el diálogo, la realidad va tomando forma —cobra esencia— en su desarrollo». Gonzalo Navajas, «El diálogo y el yo en *Retahílas*», *Hispanic Review*, 53 (1985), 250-39, p. 36.

<sup>4</sup> Peter Axthelm, *The Modern Confessional Novel* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967), p. 8. Cited by Joan Lipman Brown, *Secrets from the Back Room* (University, Mississippi: Romance Monographs, 1987), p. 97.

<sup>5</sup> Kathleen M. Glenn, «Hilos, ataduras y ruinas en la novelística de Carmen Martín Gaité», pp. 33-45 in *Novelistas femeninas de la postguerra española*, ed. Janet W. Pérez, Studia Humanitatis/Porrúa Turanzas: Madrid, 1983.

and Germán is having problems with Ester). Some of these ruptures will be restored or healed within the narrative while others can not or will not be.

But an even more fundamental fragmentation is that of the «selves» of these characters. They know, consciously or unconsciously, that they are lacking something, that they are incomplete. Their conversation or dialogue constitutes a search for that something which will unite their identities, which will complete the picture. Germán expresses this in images of light and shadow: «Ya ves, yo vengo aquí en cierta manera a buscar el rastro de la luz y tú más bien parece que el de las sombras...»<sup>6</sup>

The search for the self is primarily Eulalia's search, symbolized by her return to Louredo, her history enclosed within a «labyrinth of herrajes». The conversation is an attempt to find the center of the labyrinth. Manuel Durán points out that neither Martín Gaité nor Proust find that the past can be recaptured selectively; rather, it must be taken as a whole, taken apart, both the pleasant and the unpleasant, re-understood, and put in order<sup>7</sup>. It is the confronting and accepting of «lo agradable» and «lo desagradable» which is the essence of individuation.

The first chapter of the book is replete with images of the passage of time, of the past, of searching, of death, and of elements which Eulalia had relegated to the past, either hidden or forgotten: ruins, cracks, the mountain, the horse and rider, the trunk. Louredo, the house, is a ruin. Traditionally, images of ruins signify desolation and lifelessness. They symbolize sentiments, ideas or bonds which are no longer alive but which nevertheless persist, saturated with the past and incarnating a sense of destruction brought about by the passage of time. Ruins are symbolically equivalent to biological mutilation<sup>8</sup>. Eulalia's preoccupation with the webs of cracks (*grietas*) in the house is parallel to her concern for the webs of wrinkles appearing on her own face. She has

<sup>6</sup> Carmen Martín Gaité, *Retahílas*, Ediciones Destino: Barcelona, 1987, p. 64. Further referents to the novel will be taken from this edition and will appear in parentheses in the text.

<sup>7</sup> «Hay que sacarlo todo, volver a comprenderlo y ordenarlo todo, lo agradable y lo desagradable». Manuel Durán, «Carmen Martín Gaité: *Retahílas*, *El cuarto de atrás*, y el diálogo sin fin». *Revista Iberoamericana*, 1981 July-Dec., 47 (116-117): 233-240, p. 239.

<sup>8</sup> J. E. Cirlot, *A Dictionary of Symbols*, Philosophical Library, New York: 1962, p. 264.

avoided Loredó as she has worked hard to slow the appearance of wrinkles in her face, yet knowing that both «ruins» are inevitable.

Overall, it might be said that the return to the ancestral manor is a return to childhood innocence. If, by virtue of association, anything old is symbolically genuine and unadulterated, it thereby stands for truth. «By analogy, whatever is old is related to the primitive stages in the individual's life, i.e., to the carefree life of the child, the 'paradise lost' of childhood»<sup>9</sup>.

When Germán arrives at Louredo, Eulalia is not in the house, but rather is out climbing Tangaraño, a mountain of magical proportions. While on the mountain, she sees—or thinks she sees—a mysterious rider on a black horse, a vision which frightens her. She identifies the rider and horse with Death—remembering her mother's conception of death as literary figure. Traditionally, the symbolism of the horse is very complex, and not really clearly defined beyond a certain point. In some ancient cults, it symbolizes cyclical movements of world phenomena, whether they be cosmic forces or intense desires and instincts, none of which can be controlled or accepted intellectually. In other instances, the horse is conferred with powers of augury, often giving warning to its master. Jung, however, posited the horse as a symbol for the mother, asserting that it expresses the «magic side», the «mother within us», that is, intuitive understanding<sup>10</sup>.

It is clear that in one sense, the house, the mountain, and the horse and rider are fragments of Eulalia. The house is the equivalent for Eulalia to the grandmother's trunk. Like all depositories whose basic use is keeping or containing, the trunk or box can refer symbolically both to the unconscious and to the maternal body itself<sup>11</sup>. The mountain, the landscape, is a part of her in that there is an inner bond linking the character of the scene with the spirit of the observer:

...se superpone inesperadamente a los demás paisajes, aparece en mis sueños, decora mis lecturas, me lo sé palmo a palmo, de la infancia es inútil renegar, es mi tierra (24-25).

The horse and rider represent both intuition and death, both of which frighten, but will bring an end to the limited, fragmented, rational Eulalia.

<sup>9</sup> Cirlot, p. 13.

<sup>10</sup> Cirlot, pp. 144-145.

<sup>11</sup> Cirlot, p. 30.

These symbols, together with the conversation between Eulalia and Germán, will reveal the fragments of Eulalia's self which she herself must recognize and accept. The conversation takes place at night, beginning at twilight, the dividing-line between day and night, which symbolizes dichotomy, joining and separating opposites. Night itself is traditionally related to the passive principle, the feminine and the unconscious<sup>12</sup>.

Eulalia is at Louredo because of a «meaningful» coincidence; she appeared at her grandmother's house at the precise moment when the old woman, anxious to leave, phrased her urgent message in a language which could be meaningfully received by Eulalia alone. For both Eulalia and her grandmother, the journey to Louredo represents the only trip left, or, as Eulalia says, «fundamento de todos los asuntos pendientes» (71) «el único viaje irremisible» (67). This time the journey must be taken within herself; going back to Louredo means destroying the ideal and facing what is real. The magical mood is thus created by symbols and images which point to the approach of the end of a life: literally, the grandmother's, and symbolically Eulalia's through the death of her fragmented self. The grandmother has intuited her death and has made the journey to complete it. Now Eulalia, so like her, senses a similar death for herself, and is afraid.

Throughout their lengthy dialogue, both Germán and Eulalia divulge their recollections and interpretations of the past and of their self-concept. Again, the focus is on Eulalia-Germán principally fleshes out her story, giving another perspective, bringing out things and ideas either that she could not know, or that she would have forgotten, or that she would have avoided (as she avoided Germán at the New Year's Eve party).

As their dialogue begins, we see that Eulalia is completely and, perhaps unconsciously identified with the facet of herself which she has chosen to convey to the world, her *persona* as the «new» —for her generation— feminist intellectual, a person who, as Jungians would say, «feigns individuality, making others and [herself] believe that [she] is individual, whereas [she] is simply acting a role

---

<sup>12</sup> «The Greeks believed that night and darkness preceded the creation of all things. Hence, night —like water— is expressive of fertility, potentiality and germination; it is an anticipatory state in that, though not yet day, it is the promise of daylight. Within the tradition of symbology it has the same significance as death and the colour black.» Cirlot, p. 218.

through which the collective psyche speaks»<sup>13</sup>. In this case, she, like many others of her generation, identifies with the rebel, the breaker of ties, the heroine on a quest or journey. Eulalia has been «en busca de paraísos por esas carreteras de Dios... y total para nada» (70). From the spiritual point of view, the journey is never merely a passage through space, but rather an expression of an urgent desire for discovery and change. To study, to inquire, to seek or to live with intensity through new and profound experiences are all modes of travelling or, to put it another way, spiritual and symbolic equivalents of the journey. Travelling, Jung observes, is an image of desire, of an unsatisfied yearning that never finds its goal, seek where it may. He goes on to point out that this goal is in fact the lost Mother, but we might equally well say that, on the contrary, its journey is a flight from the mother... But the true Journey is neither compliance nor escape is evolution<sup>14</sup>.

Eulalia suffers a painful neurosis, which she has been unable to resolve. Through her dialogue with Germán, she brings to the surface memories, parts of herself which she had long repressed, which she assumed she had suppressed. From the symbols and dreams she proffers, we recognize a fragmentation of her own personality, a split, a «painful neurosis». Counterpart to the rational is the irrational, or, in Jung's terminology, in opposition to the thinking Amazon is the feeling Medium, here projected upon Juana, Eulalia's other «yo».

Eulalia's liberation was obtained at the cost of Juana's servitude. Juana, the magical child, the ultimate connection to the past, is portrayed as a deformed mirror. Symbolically, the mirror has been related to thought; it is an instrument of self-contemplation as well as the reflection of the universe. Interestingly enough, it is related to moon-symbolism through its reflecting and passive characteristics. For Loeffler, mirrors are magic symbols for unconscious memories<sup>15</sup>. Eulalia's mirrors are Juana's eyes, «inalterables los que estancan el tiempo de la infancia como espejos deformes y por eso acongojan» (101). Juana is the reflection of the passage of time, the picture of Dorian Gray, the true reflection of what Eulalia herself might have been had she not succeeded in delaying the inevitable

<sup>13</sup> Demaris S. Wehr, *Jung & Feminism. Liberating Archetypes*, Beacon Press: Boston, 1989, p. 56. Wehr is citing Jung.

<sup>14</sup> Cirlot, p. 157.

<sup>15</sup> Cirlot, pp. 201-202.

wrinkles and sags by dint of saunas, massages, beauty creams and fashionable dresses. Juana appears repeatedly in Eulalia's dreams and nightmares: «lo único que sé es que la aparición de Juana significa un toque de alarma sobre algo que a mi alrededor se concluye o se transforma sin que yo me esté dando cuenta, que sus ojos me avisan» (111). Juana is the other «yo», the umbilical cord to the past, to Louredo, and a mirror of the present, negation of the illusion of youth, proof of the passage of time, the fear of death.

Besides Juana, another element of Eulalia's self is Adriana, a character from a novel which the adolescent Eulalia read obsessively over and over for seven years, coming to identify completely with the character as the ideal feminine. Adriana has remained present, through recurrent dreams in which the book at times appears as a door, a feminine symbol which contains all the implications of the symbolic hole, the «opening» of this world on to the other world, the passage from spatial to non-spatial, from temporal to non-temporal existence<sup>16</sup>. [Books in general have had a powerful and private influence on Eulalia. Interestingly enough, it seems that Germán is more affected by movies than books.] Books are doors to the past, to parts of the self which Eulalia has repressed or denied; they accuse her of the fallacies of her self. For the young Eulalia, books came to represent freedom, the door to another world, one which she could define and conquer. Adriana is a part of herself which Eulalia has closed off from the present, but which still manifests its presence in dreams. Adriana, «nombre de fuego», symbol of energy, libido and fecundity, passion, «nombre que se infiltraba en mi sangre alterándola» (41). Adriana, the *ánima*, the inspiration and nemesis of the hero, the «reverso de la Virgen, la diosa de la noche, secreción de la luna» (43).

Eulalia still identifies with the moon, the «diosa desafiante» (35). From the earliest times, there has been a recognition of the relationship between the moon and the tides, and the connection between the cycle of the moon and the physiological rhythm of women, making the moon, in effect, the «master of women». Also essential is the fact that the moon seems to change its appearance through its phases; thus, symbolically,

<sup>16</sup> Cirlot, pp. 81, 142.

...it is the being which does not keep its identity but suffers 'painful' modifications to its shape as a clear and entirely visible circle. [Its] phases are analogous to the seasons of the year and to the ages in the span of [a] life, and are the reasons for the affinity of the moon with the biological order of things...<sup>17</sup>

Eulalia now recognizes the power of the «biological order» over the intellectual; the intensity of the maternal instinct which she had previously shunned has intruded upon the neatness of her life and her relationship with Andrés. She recognizes that a part of her self, symbolized by the moon, is beyond rational control: «[que] me fundía y me abandonaba, podía hacer de mí lo que quisiera y siempre ha conocido su poder, me puede hacer perder hasta la memoria y la dignidad, las riendas de mi vida, insufla y apadrina en mí los más inesperados trastornos, y lo sabe» (36).

Another manifestation of Eulalia's fragmentation is, in Jungian terms, her shadow, the opposite of the conscious personality, experienced in others of the same sex. The shadow here is clearly Lucía, whose nurturing, maternal, sacrificing, and enabling qualities are rejected by the liberated Eulalia. The duality is expressed in terms of opposition: «sol» versus «luna». Lucía, like her son, identifies with the sun. The core of sun symbolism is courage, creativity and guidance. Logic, good judgement and will power are solar, while imagination, sensibility and intuition are lunar. For Jung the Sun is a symbol of the source of life and of ultimate wholeness<sup>18</sup>. Lucía represented an untenable choice for Eugenia: to be either a mother or a person. It was inconceivable for Eulalia that a modern woman could sacrifice her self to love; the ideal was the independence which she perceived men enjoyed. Lucía, on the other hand, was content to be a woman, had no desire to become what she was not, saw no benefit to being a man. Independence and a career were secondary: «el amor es lo único que cambia y hace vivir a las personas» (147). As Eulalia explores more of herself, she comes to realize that she has accepted the position of Lucía as a valuable and valid one in her mature understanding of what it means to be a woman. She can accept the idea of adaptation and maternity as valid roles which need not

<sup>17</sup> Cirlot, pp. 204-206.

<sup>18</sup> Cirlot, pp. 302-304.



by force conflict with or eliminate the possibility of other, more intellectual manifestations. In this realization, Eulalia accepts her shadow as a part of her self. She takes the first step towards self-discovery, towards individuation.

In Jungian terms, the next step after the integration of the shadow is acquaintance with the anima or animus, a guiding or controlling spirit which can be negative or positive. For Jung, a woman possessed by her animus will insist on the rightness of her opinions, to the point of nagging, controlling, even, as Freud would have it, castrating. *Retahílas* has more than its share of this type of woman, from Colette to the grandmother, to Eulalia herself (who recognizes that she projects her own qualities onto her grandmother). In her youth, Eulalia rejected Adriana as an element of herself, thus rejecting the bonds of love as «old-fashioned». Instead, she resolved to become Madame Merteuil, «cínica, descreída, artífice de su propio destino» (148), embracing a calculating concept of love as a trap. But now, Eulalia has looked to Andrés for guidance and stability. In the positive light, the animus represents an ability to focus, clarity of thought, precision, and analytical ability. Eulalia has turned to Andrés to fulfill this function, but in reality, she sees herself as a guiding light for him. Rather than guidance from him, she seeks a narcissistic corroboration of her own worth: «lo que necesitaba vorazmente era notar en sus ojos que me iba a admirar siempre» (210). He has not been able to help her out of the «laberinto de teorías» and resolve her increasingly obsessive preoccupation with the idea of bearing a child, though she desperately needs him to resolve her indecision. Yet, when she has the opportunity to confront him with her gears and desires, she cannot. Either he gives the wrong answer («ya hemos decidido no tener hijos, ¿no?, pues entonces qué más da, no te calientes la cabeza» [215]). Or she cannot ask the right question («me extrañaba de la poca relación que tenían aquellos argumentos con lo que había en realidad pensado...» [212]). From a desire to protect, from one to control, from a desire to maintain the ties to Andrés, Eulalia recognizes that her most brilliant rhetoric and the structure of her life have been the avoidance of what now obsesses her.

The identity of the self results from the recognition of the symbolic fragments of the nucleus of the psyche, the *desdoblamiento* which Eulalia recognizes is taking place.

Throughout the course of the novel-dialogue, the chapters identify the basic fragments of Eulalia's self, which are in fact projected onto the other characters of the novel. Jung believes that the nucleus of the psyche normally expresses itself in some kind of four-fold structure. Significantly, Eulalia's self is represented by four manifestations. Here, these fragments can be identified as follows: Adriana of her youth, the heroine of the *novela rosa*, a creature of intense desires and imagination; Juana, the creature of magic, fears, jealousy, and hurt, the repository of guilt and passing time; Lucía, the selfless lover and mother; and Mme. de Merteuil, the solitary, intellectual, controlling, free spirit.

The end of the novel signals an acceptance of all these facets. By retying bonds with Germán, the intellectual Eulalia becomes, in a sense, Lucía, in reality the substitute for the mother he has been seeking. At the same time he sees in her evidence of the attractive, fascinating, almost literary character, the theatrical «personaje solitario» she has projected. By accepting her faults and owning her guilt, Eulalia incorporates Juana; the Picture of Dorian Gray no longer bears all the sacrifice. By facing the reality of the past and the fact of the present and the passage of time, Eulalia/Mme. de Merteuil is seen as what she is, a childless forty-five-year-old woman.

In order for the reintegration of the fragments of the self to be accomplished, in order for the authentic self to be realized, the near-death of the ego must occur. That is not the same as annihilation of the ego. Death of the false self must necessarily precede the birth of the true self, the result of this «death» being a capacity for true relationship<sup>19</sup>. The reunion with Germán has made this possible. He is her «piedra de toque», the child she might have had had if she had the courage of Lucía's convictions.

The horse under the balcony brings death to the grandmother, an end to the world of Louredo, and sleep to Eulalia. The recognition and reintegration of Eulalia's self brings a temporary death, like that of the moon, an end of an epoch. The dialogue of the characters has, in the course of the night, stopped time. Germán and Eulalia have rummaged through their personal trunks of memories and have found that *they are* their memoirs. It is not a sad or depressing ending. In the course of their conversation, loose ends have been tied up, fragments have been glued together, *retahílas* have been put in order.

<sup>19</sup> Wehr, p. 103.